



MAYOR MARIA RIVERA
Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Address

Good evening Madam President Vega, Honorable Members of the City Council, and residents of our beautiful city.

I am so honored to deliver my first-ever budget address tonight during my first term as Mayor. I wish we could all be together in person, but I have hope that will happen for us soon.

Hitting our First 100 Days milestone last month was a huge moment of pride, and tonight, this moment is an even greater honor. It's about our important days ahead, and laying the groundwork for our city's recovery.

There's no question that the past 15 months have brought about some of the most gut-wrenching hardships our city has ever faced. From tragically losing beloved neighbors to this deadly virus to others losing jobs and desperately needed wages to make ends meet, these challenges have been heavy.

Today, we recognize our important role in fighting back, and using the weight of these challenges as momentum forward.

As we work hard to get to the other side of this pandemic, I see lighter and brighter days ahead. I see a city working hard to reopen and rebuild. I see our families and neighbors enjoying the beauty of our city together again. I see strengthened small businesses helping our diverse economy shine brighter again. I see healthier homes, upgraded infrastructure, and revitalized buildings that bring in new life, new visitors, and new opportunity.

This is our season of overcoming.

With this affirmation in mind, I proudly stand before you tonight to outline my vision for our City of Central Falls and our success in fiscal year 2022. Put simply, this budget is a strong commitment to building a more open government that works better for our people.

Presenting a city budget that does not put more financial pressure on our residents was top of mind for me. As I went door-to-door to visit residents and businesses, I heard our community loud and clear to hold the line on taxes.

I am pleased to report that this – my first city budget as Mayor – includes no tax increases!

During this pandemic, I know even a small increase could mean the difference between a family being able to cover a necessity, like rent. This decision was an important one for me.

This budget emphasizes fiscal responsibility. It outlines investments that set our city up to be stronger in the months and years ahead, like continuing to fund our pension fund at 100% and investing in Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) for our future retiree health care benefits.

As we begin receiving federal recovery dollars, I am putting together a community-based advisory committee to support the efficient use of the funds we will be receiving. I believe it's important for our community to

have a voice and role in prioritize this spending. Our newly launched city website has been built with government transparency and accessibility in mind, and we will use it to clearly communicate this federal spending. I am looking forward to our community helping us identify important ways to spend this money, like working with our Parks and Recreation Department to identify a project for our community. This will be the first time in city history we will be enacting participatory budgeting.

As Mayor, my number one priority for our city is beating this pandemic and keeping our city safe. I am so proud of our community that has stepped up in big ways to help in this herculean effort, like registering more residents who may be hesitant to get the vaccine and running vaccine clinics that have served as a model for other communities throughout the state.

If you live in our city, please help us by encouraging your neighbors and loved ones to get vaccinated! We will continue to make this process easy and accessible. Through investment in our office of constituent services and health, this budget continues our necessary work for COVID vaccines, testing, and steps to keep our public buildings sanitized and safe. This virus has taken too much from us already, and we must do all we can to rid it from our community once and for all.

My second priority is rebooting our Central Falls economy. I know our housing infrastructure plays a direct role in our economic success. I am launching and investing \$50,000 into a new Affordable Housing Fund. Our recent three-day Housing Summit identified more than a dozen housing projects that can directly create jobs and develop safe, affordable housing for our residents. This is just the beginning of this necessary work.

As we build up our economy, our success will be measured in part by our work to help more people come to our businesses, events, and enjoy Central Falls. Our department of planning and economic development has been busy making progress, from launching a new Business Database to better communicate (and bi-lingually) with all registered city businesses, to launching a robust outreach effort to help connect our business owners to important federal and state recovery resources, to a “Take It Outside” effort to inspire outdoor dining with local takeout food at Dexter Plaza, to an investment in Central Falls Restaurant Week, to winning a joint grant with Pawtucket to progress our Central Falls-Pawtucket Economic Development Plan. Our small businesses are the heart of our economy and what help make our city so culturally vibrant – I look forward to seeing them thrive.

As we make thoughtful decisions on ways to improve our community, we must consider the quality of life in our neighborhoods. This budget creates a new community garden and park on Phillips Street near our High School and we will be inviting the neighborhood to help design it.

We are also creating programs for our older residents, like senior concerts, picnics with seniors, and organized physical activities in the park. As more of our community gets vaccinated and can safely gather, I hope to see many seniors enjoy quality time together that I know has been deeply missed. I’ve also missed spending time with our seniors, and will be holding quarterly meetings with our senior residents to listen to their ideas and address any of their questions or needs.

Our athletic fields and parks throughout the city play an important role in enriching our neighborhoods and community. Through our parks and recreation department, we’ve been working hard to keep our city clean, including our greenspaces. Beyond our clean-up efforts, we are hiring new field supervisors to continue protecting and preserving our amazing new athletic fields. I look forward to these spaces being enjoyed by our residents and visitors for years to come.

But our well-kept outdoor spaces aren’t all our community has to enjoy. Together with Congressman Cicilline, we have outlined a bold vision for a new Community and Senior Center, something our city has been without for a decade. The lack of this Community Center has been challenging on many fronts –

including making our vaccine distribution efforts more difficult. I hope to share details with you on this exciting investment in the very near future.

As our community spaces are enjoyed, we also need to ensure our streets are safe. One of the most common complaints I hear from residents time and time again is regarding speeding. To stop this in our neighborhoods, we will be installing new speed cameras to directly address this concern, and lay out a clear plan for introducing these. All of our residents deserve safer streets to drive, park, and walk on. Part of our safety work will also include continuing to increase our police department's accessibility, and we will launch community meetings for residents to raise any questions or concerns with the department directly.

As an older city, our infrastructure is also older. Though we are part of the Narragansett Bay Commission, most of the sewer lines are our city's responsibility, with costly repairs happening on an as-needed basis. Together with Representative Joshua Giraldo and Senator Jonathon Acosta, we have started to lay the foundation to transfer ownership of our deteriorating sewer infrastructure to the Narragansett Bay Commission.

It's clear our older infrastructure needs improvements beyond our sewer lines – like our roads and sidewalks. We will be repairing and repaving Cross Street and Central Street and, in the near future, will be outlining a plan to fix more roads and more sidewalks so that our infrastructure keeps improving. This includes continuing to fix our school buildings and laying out a vision for a new High School. This also includes making important public safety equipment investments, like a new police cruiser and a new rescue for our fire department.

In the wake of some of the most challenging months our community has faced, this budget recognizes the steps we need to take to recover, build, and thrive. We can overcome the hurdles and hardships we've faced, together.

This budget isn't just about our economy – it's about our people. Behind every decision made in this budget, I asked, *"Is this best for our residents?"*

These fiscally-responsible decisions will make a better today and a brighter tomorrow. I am confident this budget and its priorities are the best path forward to helping our city recover and rebuild.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all of the members of our City Council who have been tremendous leaders in our community, and our department leaders and staff for their commitment to this vision for a stronger Central Falls.

Lastly, I want to thank our residents – our taxpayers – because I know these past 15 months have not been easy. Your perseverance has inspired me. I will continue fighting for you and this city we are all proud to call home.

This job of serving you as your Mayor is the honor of a lifetime.

May God bless you all, and may God bless our City of Central Falls!